

PSITTACOSIS

(PARROT FEVER, CHLAMYDIOSIS, CHLAMYDOPHILOSIS, ORNITHOSIS)

What is psittacosis?

Psittacosis is an infectious disease that humans get from infected birds. It is caused by the bacteria *Chlamydophila psittaci* (formerly known as *Chlamydia psittaci*) and is usually transmitted from an infected pet bird of the parrot family. Turkeys, chickens, pigeons, and almost any other bird can be infected.

Who gets psittacosis?

The disease most commonly affects pet-store workers, farmers, and slaughterhouse workers, or people who have recently purchased an infected bird. People with weakened immune systems such as the elderly, AIDS patients, and organ transplant recipients are more susceptible to the disease.

How is psittacosis spread?

People get the disease by breathing the dust from dried droppings in birdcages, or by handling infected birds in slaughterhouses. Human-to-human spread has not been reported. The bacteria in the environment are very resistant: waste material in birdcages can be infectious for weeks.

What are the symptoms of psittacosis?

Humans usually start to feel ill 4 to 15 days after exposure. The symptoms are fever, headache, chills, cough, and sometimes pneumonia. The signs of disease in birds are nonspecific and include poor appetite, ruffled appearance, discharge from the eyes or nose, and diarrhea. Birds can die of the disease.

How is psittacosis diagnosed?

In humans, the diagnosis is made by specific blood tests. In birds, the infection can be diagnosed by a special test performed on swabs from the mouth or cloaca.

What is the treatment for psittacosis?

Tetracycline is the antibiotic of choice for treating humans; however, erythromycin or other antibiotic drugs may be used. Contact your physician for the appropriate treatment. Birds are treated with tetracyclines for long periods. Contact a veterinarian regarding the proper treatment of birds.

How can I prevent the spread of psittacosis?

If birds are kept as pets, clean up their droppings often so that fecal matter does not collect, dry out, and become airborne. Reducing stress in birds by good husbandry also lessens the chances of *Chlamydophila* being shed from birds. If you suspect your pet bird or flock may be infected, take them to a veterinarian for diagnosis and treatment. Take steps to keep the circulation of feathers and dust to a minimum. This is best done

by frequent wet mopping with disinfectants, spraying floors with disinfectant solutions prior to sweeping, and preventing air currents from circulating contaminated debris.

The California Department of Health Services (DHS) monitors human and avian psittacosis cases in California. The local county health departments are responsible for the investigation of human and pet bird psittacosis cases (including trace-backs of recently acquired birds) and ensuring that infected birds are quarantined during the 30 or 45 days of treatment.

Where can I get more information regarding psittacosis?

The Compendium of Psittacosis Control is available on the DHS website, under the Veterinary Public Health Section <http://www.dhs.ca.gov/ps/dcdc/disb/disbindex.htm>.